

Pocahontas County

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Chapter 6 - Section 2

Cass Presbyterian Church

Cass, in Pocahontas County, has for a number of years been the center of an extensive lumber industry, and a considerable amount of lumber is still produced in this area. The citizenship of Cass is unusually cosmopolitan in character.

The first Presbyterian services in Cass were conducted by Rev. Henry W. McLaughlin, then pastor of the Liberty and Baxter Churches, in 1900. He organized a Sunday School in the school house at this time and the preaching services were also conducted here.

It was in 1903 that Asa D. Watkins, a student at the Union Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia, was sent to Cass by the Home Mission Committee to preach during the summer vacation. He saw the need of a church there and after his graduation proceeded to carry out his idea by hard and systematic work. With the aid of J. S. Mathews, the late Samuel B. Hannah and other prominent men in the Greenbank District, enough money was raised through loans and subscription to start the church building which, when completed in 1904, was dedicated by Rev. Henry W. McLaughlin. To Asa Watkins should go the credit of making this church possible. He did everything from raising the money to employing men to do the constructing which he superintended

and aided.

"Professor Asa D. Watkins of Hampden Sidney College and formerly a pastor of this church, died suddenly on December 17, 1932."

As time passes and many new churches come into this fold and worship God in a comfortable and beautiful church building, and its affairs are organized and governed by capable christian men and women, it should be remembered that it was Asa Watkins, a ministerial student, who came to Cass at vacation time, and conducted services in whatever building was procurable and ministered to the needs of its people. It was he who saw the need of a church in this town when practically no one else did, and working alone, raised money through direct subscription and loans, whereby the nucleus of the present building was erected and furnished. He hired the men to do the work and did a good bit of it himself. It was he who induced the members of the Presbyterian Church who had moved to Cass, to procure their letters in order that a congregation might be organized. It was he who moderated the first congregational meeting at which time the organization was made complete. In fact, it was through the persistent and untiring efforts of Asa D. Watkins that the movement was started that culminated in the present organization, and that has brought many souls to Christ.

The deed for the lots to this church was made on Aug. 1, 1921, from the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Co. to R. S. Hickman, J. S. Mathews and U. S. Hannah, Trs. for the Cass Presbyterian Church, subject to the following reservations and restrictions: that the lots are to be used for the purpose of maintaining thereon a house for Divine worship or other buildings for strictly religious purposes. Should the parties of the second part or their successors in office ever abandon use of said premises for such purposes or within forty years from this date attempt to dispose of said premises to others to be used for other than religious purposes, the title of the said premises shall revert to the party of the first part.

The Cass Presbyterian Church was organized with a membership of twelve persons. On the following yeat, 1905, there were nineteen members reported to the General Assembly. The names of the charter members that I have been able to get are:

Dr. H. Ward Randolph	Mrs. W. F. Anderson
Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Mathews	" S. B. Kethken
Dr. and Mrs. J. D. Arbuckle	" S. L. Clark
Mr. James A. Kirkpatrick	
Mr. and Mrs. Benj. F. Conrad	
Miss Nannie Gillispie (now Mrs. J. Hall Wilson)	

Dr. H. Ward Randolph and Mr. J. S. Mathews were elected, ordained and installed elders and Dr. J. D. Arbuckle, Ben-

Jamin F. Conrad and James A. Kirkpatrick, deacons.

After Dr. Watkins resigned the pulpit was filled from time to time with several ministers, all of whom preached at Liberty Church at Greenbank and Baxter Church at Dunmore.

Later a request was sent to Greenbrier Presbytery to segregate the Cass Church from the Liberty and Baxter Churches, the promise being made that it could support a full time minister. The request was granted and Rev. Fred W. Gray was suggested. He was immediately called. His services were valuable indeed. He brought a large number of new members into the church and was one of its greatest pastors and preachers. During his pastorate the church building was remodeled and enlarged.

The corner stone of this building was laid by the Masonic Grand Lodge of West Virginia. The dedicatory sermon was preached by Dr. Walter W. Bain. Asa Watkins preached the evening sermon. For many years the Cass Church has been out of debt.

All denominations used the Cass Presbyterian Church for a number of years.

The building occupied by the Cass congregation was erected in 1904, and remodeled in 1919. It was partially destroyed by fire in March, 1927, and was repaired and remodeled later that same year. Many or most of the church records were destroyed at the time of the fire.

The roll of ministers of the Cass Presbyterian Church is as follows:

Ass D. Watkins, D.D	1904-1907
A. W. Bain	1907-1910
J. S. Kennison	1910-1912
Louis A. Kelly	1912-1915
Fred W. Gray, D.D.	1915-1929
James T. Pharr	1929- present

Today this church has an active membership of one hundred forty-four persons. It has for many years sent a steady stream of young people into city churches in this and adjoining states.

This church has enjoyed an aggressive leadership and is active in all of its various departments, being noted for the fine young people it has developed in the church's service. The work of its Woman's Auxiliary has been especially efficient.

The Cass Presbyterian Church has in the past maintained outpost work in certain nearby lumbering settlements, notably at Spruce and Raywood, but these have been discontinued as the lumber operations in these settlements have closed and the people have moved away.

A number of active workers in the church's service have gone out from the Cass church, among whom may be named Rev. T. L. Harnsberger, missionary to Africa; Miss Alice Hannah, teacher of missionaries' children in Africa; and

the Rev. Lewis Lyle, now serving in Chicago, Ill.

Union prayer meetings are held alternately with the three churches at Cass. No other denominations hold services at the present time in the Presbyterian Church.

The present pastor, Rev. James T. Pharr, was born in Charlotte, North Carolina. He attended Charlotte School for Boys, Davidson College and Union Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia. Rev. Pharr has served the Cass Presbyterian Church and the Alexander Memorial Church at Stony Bottom for the past eleven years.

During the past year nine new members were added to the Cass Church.

A Daily Vacation Bible School was conducted in our church under the direction of Rev. Blandon from the Seminary at Richmond. The school opened July 22, 1940 and continued through July 26th. Rev. J. T. Pharr and the following young people assisted with this school: Evelyn Fox, Beatrice Blackhurst, Ernestine Hamrick, William Viering, and Tim Pharr.

Each year this church sends a group of young people to camp and conference.

The present Elders are:

F. C. Nickell

E. Shafer

A. N. Smith

Ray H. Fox

A. J. Blackhurst

J. H. Moyer

S. D. Huff

L. L. Duncan

Deacons:

J. A. Kirkpatrick

W. G. Moss

C. M. Stover

R. S. Hickman

Guy Tallman

Luther B. Jones

The Sunday School enrollment at the present time is one hundred thirty-three.

The Young Peoples League organized an outpost Sunday School at Deer Creek with an enrollment of twenty. Harold Nickell served as the Supt. of this Sunday School until recently when he went to work in another town and Mr. A. N. Smith, Sr., is now Supt. This Sunday School is now self-supporting.

I have been unable to find any record of the first women's societies in the Cass Church. The women of the church are now organized according to the Auxiliary plan of worship. The following is a list of the presidents of the Auxiliary to date:

Mrs. J. S. Hannah

Mrs. R. S. Clark

Mrs. T. J. Kenealy

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Mrs. J. H. Moyer	
Mrs. W. A. Hammen	
Mrs. E. P. Shaffer	1929 to March 1930
Mrs. E. L. Duncan	1930-1932
Mrs. J. N. Hannah	1932-1934
Mrs. R. W. Fox	1934-1936
Mrs. W. L. Ralston	1936-1938
Mrs. W. T. Miller	1938-1940

The average enrollment for the ten years is fifty-four members. The largest number on roll at any one time is sixty-one. The smallest was fifty.

The enrollment this year is forty. This is because of so many members moving away. The following are the officers for 1940-1941:

President -----	Mrs. W. T. Miller
Vice-President -----	Mrs. W. L. Ralston
Secretary -----	Mrs. T. J. Kenealy
Treasurer -----	Mrs. L. B. Jones
Historian -----	Mrs. J. W. Keyser

In 1934, a Business Womens Circle was organized with twenty-six members on roll. They pay a definite part of the budget each year. This year the amount is fifty dollars.

Each year the Auxiliary sends from two to four young people to the Conference at Lewisburg. This year four young people were sent to camp. For five years they sent one delegate to N. Va. Synodical Training School. For two years two

delegates were sent to this school.

Each year since 1936, the Auxiliary has adopted a child from the orphanage (to the extent of buying his clothes). Last year \$28.28 was spent for outfitting the orphan.

At Thanksgiving time each year a large box of canned fruit is sent to the Davis-Stuart School. At Christmas time baskets of fruit, toys and clothing are sent to the needier families in the community.

Each year the ladies read a book on Home Missions and one on Foreign Missions. Special classes are held for discussion of these books.

Once during the year there are study classes of at least five hours of intensive study of some Book or Theme of the Bible.

In 1936 a plan was suggested in the church whereby each person read a certain portion of the Bible each day. At the end of the year many had read their Bible through. Now each woman follows the Auxiliary suggestion for daily Bible reading.

The Auxiliary stresses tithing. Last year there were twenty-one tithers reported in our Auxiliary.

For an example of the money expended by the Auxiliary in one year, the following was for the year April 1, 1938 to April 1, 1939:

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Budget -----	\$196.00
Special Benevolences -----	86.00
Special Offerings -----	65.78
Social Service -----	51.06
Current Expenses -----	78.52
Miscellaneous -----	29.75
Total	507.11

The Auxiliary paid fifty dollars per year for three years to the Ministers' Annuity Fund. In 1935 it paid \$161.52 to paint the manse and church.

In the past few years we have lost five members of the Auxiliary by death and many members have moved away, making our enrollment at the present time forty members. Despite this fact, we have not reduced our budget and have been able to go over-the-top each year and have contributed to the causes as usual. This year we also contributed material for draperies to be used in the homes of Missionaries in Africa where our own Alice Hannah is serving as teacher of missionaries' children.

Information: Church on the Western Waters - Courtney
Mr. J. S. Mathews, Bridgeport, Conn.
Mrs. J. W. Keyser

The woman's Auxiliary was organized in July 1923, but did not join the Presbyterial until 1928.